



Department of Justice

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Eastern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, December 2, 2008
www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae
Docket #: 1:08 CR 00379 OWW

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TEN INDICTED ON DRUG TRAFFICKING AND GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE CORRUPTION CHARGES

*Ringleader Flew on Commercial Flights and Furthered Conspiracy
Under Assumed Identity with Phoney Driver's License*

FRESNO, Calif.—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott, U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent-in-Charge Javier F. Peña, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, and California Department of Motor Vehicles Chief of Investigations Kathryn Door announced today the unsealing of an indictment returned by a grand jury on October 23, 2008, charging HAAMID ALIE DARCUIEL, 32, of Fresno, Calif.; FRANCISCO RUIZ, 40, of Tucson, Ariz.; JASON SAMUELS, 29, of Stone Mountain, Ga.; SEREY KEM, 33, of Clovis, Calif., HAYBE DUDEH, 33, of Columbus, Ohio; MARIO CARLOS SAIZ, 29; ANGEL ALMAGUER III, 31; and DARNELL V. McPETERS, 33, all of Fresno, Calif., with engaging in a conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute marijuana. MICHELLE M. MERAZ, 32, of Sanger, Calif. and DAVID GARCIA, 32, of Fresno, Calif., and the ringleader DARCUIEL are charged with conspiracy, honest services mail fraud, and aggravated identity theft.

This case is the product of an investigation by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, which includes the DEA, the Fresno Police Department Major Narcotics Bureau, and the California Department of Motor Vehicles Office of Internal Affairs, with assistance from IRS—Criminal Investigation.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Marlon Cobar, who is prosecuting the case, DARCUIEL was the leader of an interstate drug trafficking organization responsible for the distribution of large amounts of marijuana to Midwestern locations such as Chicago, Ill. From November 2004 until January 2006, DARCUIEL, RUIZ, SAMUELS, KEM, DUDEH, SAIZ, ALMAGUER, and McPETERS, engaged in a conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute 1,000 kilograms or more of marijuana.

MERAZ, a former DMV employee procured an official California Driver's License for DARCUIEL that used his photograph but another person's stolen identity in exchange for a bribe paid to MERAZ through GARCIA, who acted as a broker for the transaction. The indictment alleges that DARCUIEL, MERAZ, and GARCIA conspired to defraud the DMV, the State of California, and the people of the State of California of the intangible right to the honest services of MERAZ and used the United States mail. The indictment also alleges that DARCUIEL flew on commercial interstate flights using the fake driver's license to further a marijuana trafficking conspiracy.

United States Attorney Scott said, "The United States Attorney's Office will continue to work closely with our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners to prosecute both drug

trafficking and the associated crimes which often accompany these offenses, such as the identity fraud in this case.”

“Individuals who are entrusted with sensitive information and utilize it for their own personal gain, in violation of the law and public trust, will be held accountable for their actions. Unfortunately, this case is another example of how drugs, money, and greed go hand in hand,” stated DEA Special Agent-in-Charge Peña.

The marijuana conspiracy charge carries a mandatory minimum term of 10 years and a maximum life in prison and a fine of up to \$4 million. The honest services mail fraud conspiracy charge carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, while the honest services mail fraud charge carries a 20-year maximum prison term. Both of those charges carry a maximum \$250,000 fine. The aggravated identity theft charge carries a mandatory two-year sentence consecutive to any sentence imposed by the court as to the honest services mail fraud charges. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

All defendants, except for SAMUELS and DUDEH who are considered fugitives, have been taken into custody and will appear before U.S. District Judge Oliver Wanger on December 15, 2008.

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